

Snow Line

NOVEMBER
1996

The Official Newsletter of the Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team, Inc.
Lake Tahoe · Truckee · Donner Summit

Next General Meeting is Monday, November 4, 1996, 7:00 pm at the Granlibakken Resort's Ski Hut

For Every Action...

The Benson Hut, arguably the most spectacular cabin of the Sierra Club's Tahoe backcountry hut system, was severely vandalized earlier this summer. The Benson Hut is renowned not only for its windswept, deep-snow position on the Sierra crest, but also for the unidentified occupant that paces the upstairs loft during the darkest hours of the most severe winter storms. The Benson Hut is maintained through volunteer effort and cash donations. Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team — and at least one Team individual — have made cash donations toward the repair of broken windows and a busted-up interior. If you'd like to help out with the Benson Hut repairs, call Jeff Hartly (916-426-3123) at the Sierra Club's Clair Tappaan Lodge.

On a related note, the summer '96 issue of *Karma Quarterly*, an Ahmadabad, India journal of destiny and fortune (visit their Web site at <http://www.kismet.com>), reports that the unwashed poor responsible for the rape of the Benson Hut have been occupied by the fleas of a thousand camels.

Hunter Lost (And Found) in Grouse Canyon

Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team was called by Placer County dispatch the evening of September 28 to locate a hunter reported missing from his camp. Six Nordic Team members arrived at the top of Ward Canyon geared-up and ready to go. However, for the next two hours they didn't get past the wheel wells of their cars. Then they went home. (It is still unclear to this writer why the hikers never hit the dirt.) The Nordic Team was called out again about midnight, with Gerald Rockwell and Steve Twomey the only members able to be lured from their beds. Gerald and Steve then spent the next five hours hiking up and over Grouse Rock and down Grouse Canyon. At about 5:00 am, they found 16 year-old Tim Rude, the subject of the search. He was huddled behind a downed tree near the confluence of Grouse Creek and Five Lakes Creek. Tim was dressed lightly in life-liberating cotton, had no food or matches, and was hugging his small-bore deer rifle. (Earlier that morning, on their way down Grouse Canyon, Gerald and Steve ran across Tim's camp, occupied by his Uncle Vern (the reporting party). Now, some of you may remember Uncle Vern from two years ago. He managed to break his leg and become the subject of a Nordic Team rescue. Seems the family finds yearly adventure in those particular woods.)

Tim, Gerald, and Steve were flown out of Grouse Canyon at 8:30 am by Placer County. Nordic Team member John Pang, just missing Gerald and Steve at the start of the search, teamed up with some volunteer fire fighters and USFS personnel and searched the Ward Peak area. Good job everyone!

It's A Chopper, Baby

The helicopter that flew Gerald, Steve, and hunter Tim from the woods September 29, is a Bell Jet Ranger owned and operated by Placer County. Over the past two decades, Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team has accrued much experience with various helicopters. These machines have pulled our rescuers and rescuees from a wide variety of backcountry landing zones (LZ's). In company with winning lottery tickets and Tammy Fay Baker's eye shadow, a helicopter setting down in the wilderness is something you simply cannot ignore. We travel the backcountry decorated in plastic clothing, on plastic skis, wielding

high-band radios and satellite-served location devices. It's nothing short of a space walk. And when weather permits, there is no higher-tech backcountry search and rescue toy than the hovering helo.

Shortly after flying us out of Hell Hole Reservoir in 1985, a private helicopter contractor (wearing a white dress shirt with a straight black tie from the Nixon administration) crashed his machine, killing himself. This is not an isolated incident: the CHP has crashed their helicopter; CareFlight has crashed; the Army Reserve has crashed; the powerful machines of Fallon's Naval Air Rescue have crashed; the Marines have crashed. Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team has flown with them all. In addition, numerous private heli-ski machines have crashed in various precincts of the Sierra Nevada and in many mountain ranges of the world. Helicopters crash.

The decision to use helicopters in our rescues is valid. But we must not forget they are highly dangerous machines. From a safety standpoint, once you board a helicopter and take off, there's not much you can do. Tighten your seatbelt and enjoy the ride. On the ground, however, there are many do's and don'ts.

Do's: Carry red or violet colored smoke. This will ID your position on the ground and give the pilot(s) an idea of surface wind direction. Pick an appropriate LZ. Cut trees and age-harden the snow by boot-packing if necessary. Pick as large and flat an area as possible. Be prepared before the machine sets down. Have your skis lashed together, pack

buckled down tight, straps at the ready for fastening skis to skids; think ahead and move swiftly. Wear goggles and secure loose gear. Rotor wash from the biggest machines is ferocious and loud. Communication will be by screaming only. In soft or uneven snow the pilot may keep the machine in a full-power hover just off the ground. This is a helicopter's most vulnerable position. Listen to the pilot/crew member's instructions. They know what they're doing. Down drafts and power surges can cause the rotors to dip, so keep your head low when approaching or leaving the plane. This will prevent your head from being cut off, and it looks cool in a Steve McQueen kinda way. Carry your skis and poles parallel to the plane of rotor rotation. Fly the victim(s) out first. Have the searchers that feel the strongest be the last ones airlifted out.

Don'ts: Never approach the helicopter from anywhere outside the

We'll keep going...



Nordic Team member Don Ahlert drops from a hovering Huey during a helicopter rappel training course in Fallon, NV.

photo r.osterhuber

pilot's view. A hemicycle around the front is the only area to walk. Do not walk around the back of a helicopter. The unfortunates that vandalized the Benson Hut are the only ones I know of who have business around a helicopter's tail rotor. Don't separate yourself from your pack or skis. This is an instance where you might have to overrule the pilot. They might want to fly out all the skis first, then ferry people. Stay with your gear. Period.

When they work, helicopters are incredible. But weather, mechanical difficulties, darkness, dangerous terrain, other emergencies, etc., can all negate the possibility of an airlift. We should never expect helicopter support, but we should always seek it when appropriate. Skiers, fly carefully out there.

Save Your Body, Save Your Skis (in that order)

At the last general Team meeting, training coordinator Dirk Schoonmaker reminded the membership that in order to participate in any Nordic Team training or search you must be signed up with the Office of Emergency Services (OES). This remains the only "formal" requirement of the Team, and is, in practice, only a minor hurdle. When listed with the OES, your body and equipment are insured against damage or loss during any Nordic Team search and rescue, and your body (only) is insured during Team training exercises. It's a liability thing. So, to sign up with the OES, go to the Placer County Sheriff's substation (Tahoe City) and pick up the form. The cop station is always open. Once you've completed the paperwork, call the substation (581-6300) to make sure someone will be there to take your picture. Put on your plaid sport coat and go down and smile for the Polaroid. Now, I won't kid you, the sheriff's office is a bit of a small-town bureaucracy. You may very well run into a deputy that doesn't know anything about the OES forms or Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team. But don't let that get your undies in a bunch; just be persistent and be polite. As Team member Molly Bleuel says of her quest to get her OES card: "I've been there [the sheriff's office] four times. It's easy though." Once you've been photographed and you've signed the form, you're in. Don't worry about physically possessing the card; if you completed the process you're on the books.

On The Equipment Front

Nine Bendix King portable radios and one truck-mounted radio have been donated to Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team by the California Department of Water Resources. These are surplus items, all in very good condition. This brings the Team's radio supply to over 23 units. The DWR radio donation was spearheaded by Scoop Remenih, chair of the Team's Snowcat Committee. The effort to secure these radios may seem like a relatively minor affair in theory, but in practice involves much letter writing, many phone calls, and coordination of many schedules. While searching, if we don't have communication, we have very little. These radios are an immense asset to the Team. BIG thanks to Scoop and DWR for their generosity!

The Eleventh Marriage Of Food And Wine

Mark your calendar: Thursday, November 21, 5:00 pm is the next scheduled wine and food tasting hosted by Gar Woods Grill and Pier. Wild Horse will be the featured winery of the month, and you know that the Gar Woods chefs will be whipping up some tasty treats to compliment the wine. Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team is the beneficiary of the tasting, so please support this event. If you'd like to help out, give Gerald Rockwell a call. -Tink!

Team Trainings

Here's the training calendar for November and December. Any changes to the schedule will be mentioned at the general membership meeting. If you call Peter, he'll be able to give you some additional beta. The Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team garage is located at 223 Fairway Drive, Tahoe City (behind the Tahoe City Chevron).

November 3: Hike Squaw Valley to Donner Summit. Meet 8:30 am at the Team garage or 9:00 at the Squaw tram building.

November 9: Terrain familiarization around Diamond Peak ski area and Little Valley. Meet 8:00 am at the garage or 9:00 at Tahoe Meadows (off the Mt. Rose Highway).

November 11: Classroom map and compass. Meet 6:30 pm at Kings Beach Elementary School, Room 2.

November 16: Field orienteering. Meet 8:00 am at the garage.

December 18: Truck/equipment familiarization at the garage, 6:30 pm.

THE GREAT SKI RACE™
MARCH 2, 1997
9:00 AM, SHARP!

Tahoe Nordic Search & Rescue Team Officers

President	Gerald Rockwell	583-5376
Vice President	Joe Pace	583-1806
Treasurer	Scott Schroepfer	546-2809
Secretary	Jackie Thomas	546-3592
Board Members	Dirk Schoonmaker	583-2929
	Steve Twomey	525-7280
	Medora Weiser	525-9248
	Chris Worcester	582-4648

Committee Chairs

Cuisine	Debra Schroepfer	546-2809
Dispatch	Medora Weiser	525-9248
Education	Mona Treat	581-5759
The Great Ski Race™	Douglas Read	583-6381
Newsaletter	Randall Osterhuber	587-3092
Snowcats	Tony Remenih	583-1684
Training	Dirk Schoonmaker	583-2929
	Peter Sporleder	546-0588
Truck/Equipment	Jean Wernette	546-2238
Tahoe Nordic Search & Rescue Team garage		581-4038

All phone numbers area code (916).

Photograph scanned courtesy of Compass Art, Tahoe Vista, CA.

Tahoe Nordic Search & Rescue Team, Inc.

an all-volunteer group dedicated to mountain safety
 Box 7703 • Tahoe City • California • 96145



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